

The Need for Integration of Literacy and Social Studies
in the K Through Four Literacy Block

Michael Jones

Wilmington College

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“Eliminating social studies from the elementary curriculum is an unintended, yet serious, consequence of NCLB. Studies report that 71% of schools have reduced or eliminated non-tested subjects from the curriculum” (Kinniburgh, 2008, p1). Integrated curriculum in the classroom became the policy in the 1980s; the problem is a lot of teachers did not understand what was meant by curriculum integration. The idea behind integration was, if enough good quality children’s literature was introduced based on a theme and through student interaction, the students would naturally learn; however, in the process focus on basic reading skills is lost (Kinniburgh, 2008).

Some studies showed that students in lower socioeconomic and impoverished areas receive less instruction in social studies from kindergarten through fourth grade than those students in middle and upper socioeconomic areas.

A report from the Carnegie Corporation, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, outlines specific goals for civic education: to develop Compton responsible citizens who are informed and thoughtful, participate in their communities, act politically, and have moral and civic virtues and a belief in their capacity to make the difference. Such education becomes even more important for children in poverty if they are to participate in and embrace the ideals of American democracy”. (Mcguire, 2008, p621)

Students should start learning about their government and the way the political community works our society around third grade. Waiting until high school can cause a lack in personal civic duty as well as expectations of proper behavior in a society resulting in a lack of ability to change their current social status or economic condition.

Basic methods of learning include integration, which was focused on the whole language philosophy. The current problems with the integrated teaching methods are that the teachers today are

more worried about the letter of the law in meeting state standards in literacy and mathematics that social studies are being cut out of the curriculum almost completely.

Kinniburgh (2008) states

One major misunderstanding of the integrated approach is that some teachers were of the understanding that it is teaching social studies during reading if they simply discuss text that contains the social studies concepts. Social studies instruction should be more than simply discussing main ideas scanning for information, and making predictions about the text. (2008, p6)

What teachers need to keep in mind is that social studies within the curriculum have certain rules and standards that must be followed. The social studies curriculum cannot just be a book or a passage that includes material that would be considered social studies content.

The other school of thought is the traditional separate subject method of teaching. The biggest problem with this method is that there is not enough time to teach all that is needed to meet all of the state standards. School systems have to pick and choose the most important studies to concentrate on based on their report cards for NCLB. Due to the push for reading and mathematics in standardized testing social studies is being left out of the curriculum.

Teachers and administrators in the school systems need to find a way to incorporate social studies back into the school standards. "Lessons can be created using specific instructional strategies which enable teachers to effectively cover standards in social studies in reading". (Kinniburgh, 2008, p1) By organizing curriculum in such a manor as to include a variety of subject topics all subjects can be taught proficiently and in a manor that understanding and retention is present across broad areas of study. It is possible to include social studies within literacy block of teaching skills interactively, making the students want to be more engaged.

Teaching a test that provides the great grade card for the school system but does not take into consideration what needs to be taught to turn students into proactive citizens in the community. “There is no argument to the Premise that elementary teachers need to ensure that their students learn how to read; however, it is imperative that in the process of teaching reading teachers do not sacrifice teaching their students the foundations of citizenship, which is the purpose of social studies education” (Hinde, 2005, p1).

Following literacy standards while covering social studies topics within state standards set down for both can be accomplished. Depending on the grade level, topics should be selected that are proper for that grade level while state standards for the social studies and literacy curriculum are followed. According to McGuire “there are four criteria for deciding what to teach: the material should be enduring (have value beyond the classroom), at the heart of the discipline, needing uncoverage, and potentially engaging. This is no easy task and it will take a lot of forethought on the teachers’ part to incorporate these ideas”. (2008, p622) Teachers that are willing to put forth the effort will find that it is not as big a challenge as it appears, at first to incorporate social studies or any other subject into the time set aside for literacy each day causing a more well rounded and interesting use of classroom time.

For example if you are covering the Pilgrims landing with a group of students, you could have the students divide into groups and discuss what they know or think know about the Pilgrims landing, an example of anticipation guides. After the discussion, have the students form questions based on their discussion. Have the students read the selected passage out loud in class with the teacher assisting where necessary joining in group discussion. Once the reading is completed, address the questions that the students had previously listed causing the use of grand conversations. Through class discussion, cover each of the questions and finish the lesson by having the students write a comparative list showing what

they thought they knew prior to the reading compared to what they know after the reading, developing question and answer relationships. (Kinniburgh, 2008)

Teaching social studies must incorporate ideas and situations that cause the student to think about the topic and questioning the ideas relating to the topic. It is not enough for students to memorize materials for test purposes only. Social studies are the ideas and beliefs behind who we are, and where we have been, which leads to thought of where we are going. (Hinde, 2005, Kinniburgh, 2008, McGuire, 2008, Savage, 2003)

What is needed to fix this problem is for teachers to start thinking outside the box. The way the integrated curriculum is being taught in the lower grade levels today is not helping students learn what is needed. Instead of teaching social studies in the lower grades as should be done the students are being taught basics of social studies in middle and high school. (Hinde, 2005)

An example of what is being described took place during a study by Bronwyn Cole and Margit E. McGuire (as cited in McGuire, 2008) using four kindergarten classrooms the students were asked to design a park in each classroom. The park was a group design in all four classes, teaching the students to work together and decide through compromise what was going to be in their park. During the exercise students were required to look at all aspects involved in designing and building the park. Literacy came into play with the introduction of new vocabulary introduced during the project. Through the use of word banks, visual aids, and text all curriculum skills for literacy were accomplished. The completed park projects were displayed on in each classroom.” The literacy skills were developed such as listening with a purpose, noting details, and visualizing.” (Mcguire, 2008) All of this is a holistic approach to teaching social studies, Science, and literacy to students.

These articles (Hinde, 2005, Kinniburgh, 2008, McGuire, 2008, Savage, 2003) all depicted the situation that is growing in our society due to removal of social studies from the curriculum in grades K

through four. All of these articles also agree that incorporating social studies into the literacy block of learning can be achieved while upholding all the requirements and standards attached to both subjects.

References

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